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## MEMORANDUM

TO: Superintendents and Principals and Teachers  
COPY: VSA, VPA, VSBA, VT-NEA *RH*  
FROM: Rebecca Holcombe, Secretary of Education  
SUBJECT: Keeping Perspective – SBAC Test Scores  
DATE: March 23, 2015

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SBAC just released a white paper, written by Linda Darling-Hammond, Edward Haertel and James Pelligrino (you may recognize these names), called "**Making Good Use of New Assessments: Interpreting and Using Scores From the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium.**"

[http://education.vermont.gov/documents/EDU-WhitePaper-Making\\_Good\\_Use-of\\_New\\_Assessments.pdf](http://education.vermont.gov/documents/EDU-WhitePaper-Making_Good_Use-of_New_Assessments.pdf)

Vermont played a central role in pushing for this paper, because given the high-stakes, test-based accountability context in which we labor, we wanted to hear what leading assessment experts had to say about the appropriate and inappropriate use of test scores, especially in a transition. We note that other test providers have not issued a similar document, even though all the concerns in this document would apply to other tests as well.

This report identifies several problems with the use of test-scores, particularly during a test transition. Many of these concerns echo and support the resolution the State Board of Education passed on Tuesday:

[http://education.vermont.gov/documents/EDU-SBE-031715\\_SBAC\\_Resolution.pdf](http://education.vermont.gov/documents/EDU-SBE-031715_SBAC_Resolution.pdf)

Tests can be powerful tools for establishing trends, evaluating our effectiveness with different subgroups, and auditing other local assessment tools. However, as the paper explains, there are very good empirical reasons to be cautious about making conclusions and consequential decisions based on these scores, particularly during a transition.

My hope is that this paper will help you work in a thoughtful way with your communities as we make this transition.

Please help me with three goals:

1. Let's keep the test in perspective. Tests are a fact of life, as anyone who has tried to get a driver's license knows. Let's not make our children afraid of tests. And let us use the test results as just another data point in the transition, but not represent them as anything more than they are: a new data point that needs to be properly evaluated.
2. Let's work together to make sure how we use and communicate about the tests and any results is responsible and constructive. We will continue to work on this through the next few months.
3. Let's not let the stress and high stakes associated with testing in other states undermine and distort our strong Vermont commitment to ensuring that all students have rich, broad, high-quality opportunities to learn.

Our current, relative policy stability frees us to focus on what really matters: developing our professional capital and our understanding and practice of more effective instruction, so that in turn, we can improve the learning and outcomes of our students. We are educating our children for life, not just to do well on tests. And we understand that when we talk about "our" children, we mean all of them. Let's focus on teaching every child well, and the test scores will take care of themselves.

Thank you for all you do.